

Student Essay A

The journey taken by Edna in Kate Chopin's The Awakening exemplifies the journey that is a very common feature in many works of literature. This journey is not a commonplace journey; it is one that brings about development and change in the story's main character. In The Awakening, the spiritual journey that Edna takes changes the way she thinks, acts, and lives. The ramifications of her journey change her life.

The story takes place in New Orleans around the turn of the century. The women of society were treated as possessions, either of their fathers or their husbands, or even of their religion. The story's protagonist, Edna, is introduced as the respectable wife. She is a good mother and is faithful to her husband. The family vacations for the summer in Grand Isle. While there, Edna befriends Robert who every summer devotes himself to being an attendant to one of the married women, Edna being his current choice. While there, she undergoes a series of "awakenings" which begin her journey. One such push was Edna's learning to swim. Although she was previously afraid of the water and of swimming, one day she tried, and is successful. Her newfound ability signifies the steps she is taking towards no longer being a possession. It is one of the first signs that Edna is ready to break free and to be her own person. The water gives her a sense of freedom, and she relishes this sensation.

Edna's growing love for Robert alerts her of the journey upon which she has unknowingly embarked. After Robert leaves, giving very short notice, she misses him tremendously. She realizes that she is in love with him but has no such love for her husband, Leonce. While Robert gives into her every whim, Leonce only cares about Edna as if she were his possession. He does not consider her feelings and emotions, only his own. He leaves the family often to go into the city for work, sending candy and chocolates to Edna and her children in order to compensate for his absence. He constantly neglects Edna's emotional needs, and as a result, intensifies the strength of her journey. However, Leonce is not the only person who sees Edna merely as a possession. Even Robert, who is in love with her, feels that Edna belongs to Leonce. Because he knows that she cannot be his, Robert refuses to let their relationship progress any further than it has, and the only way for him to achieve this is to go away and cut off contact with Edna.

When the family returns to their home in New Orleans, Edna is not content with her life and begins to neglect performing some of her expected activities and duties, such as entertaining the wives of her husband's clients. Edna's refusal to accompany her husband on a business trip is the pinnacle of her journey. Leonce is shocked and appalled by her noncompliance, but he feels that she is going through a phase and will soon come to her senses.

While her husband is gone, Edna's children are sent to live with their grandmother. During this time, Edna is free and independent. She meets a variety of new people who she begins to spend time with. One of these people is Alcee Arobin, who becomes her lover. This relationship is important in Edna's journey because it represents a further rift from her previous life as a possession. More and more, Edna becomes her own person. Moreover, although he tries to make her his own possession as well, Edna refuses to let Alcee have the upper hand in their relationship. She refuses to let anyone control her life ever again. She even goes so far as to close up her house and rent a much smaller place to dwell in. Edna's actions come as a shock to many

people, especially her husband, but she is really just trying to assert her individuality. However, no one understands what she is going through. In fact, many people, including her husband, blame her behavior on mental illness. Edna realizes that she cannot continue to live in this manner.

At the novel's conclusion, Edna decides to commit suicide. She swims into the ocean and drowns herself. It is fitting that she chooses the ocean, the place where she feels she has the most freedom, to end the journey. Edna decides that she would rather not live at all than to live a life where she cannot be her own person.

Student Essay B

It is easy to interpret the novel, Things Fall Apart, as a denouncement of white colonization, or simply as a detailed portrayal of African culture. But that would be all too banal; it has already been said and done by many authors. What makes this novel distinctive is the development and depiction of Okonkwo's journey through life and how his journey effects the novel's themes.

Given Okonkwo's rugged personality, he encounters many conflicts on his journey to self-awareness. Okonkwo clashes with his father, his wives, his children, his village, and perhaps every other character, but his greatest struggle is with himself. It seems as if Okonkwo's enemy is his father's flaws, but in reality, Okonkwo's hidden enemy is his fear of his father's reflection upon himself. Okonkwo spends his 10 whole life on a journey away from the values of his father, so much up to the point where he ruins his life as well as the lives of those around him. His tragic flaw is his obsessive aversion to his father's laid back character. Okonkwo is so engulfed by his life's mission to become a rejection of his father's character, that he fails to see Unoka's positive traits such as tenderness, wisdom, and a passion for life, which 15 Okonkwo lacks.

Even though Okonkwo is the protagonist in this book, he is also the antagonist; clearly, he is on a trip to disaster. He has not journeyed inside himself to understand what makes him act the way he does. He is extremely rash and explosive and does not think twice about throwing a fatal punch. He foolishly thinks that his aggressiveness is the only way for a man to act; it is this misconception that ultimately ruins him. Unfortunately for Okonkwo, he never realizes his flaw, and in the end, it is as if he cannot flee his father's reflection, for just like his father, he dies with shame and disgrace.

He had the ambition; he had the intelligence; he had the passion; but he had 25 all of these for the wrong reasons. Perhaps Things Fall Apart portrays Okonkwo's lack of development rather than his development through time. From his early youth he forms this strong aversion to weakness and ineptitude, and this controls all his actions throughout his life. In actuality, the fact that he is totally ruled by this fear of ineptitude underscores how internally weak Okonkwo is. In the end, when he 30 realizes that there is no possible way to triumph, that he cannot control people with his violent actions, and that he cannot control his fate, what does he do? He gives up and commits the most cowardly act of suicide.

Rating the Student Essays

Let's take a look at ranking comments about each of these essays. Student Essay A is a borderline high-range essay for several reasons:

- It addresses all aspects of the prompt.
- It is highly detailed (lines 13–14, 25–26, 34–35).
- It demonstrates strong topic adherence (lines 5–6, 14–15, 20, 36–37, 50–51).
- There is strong integration of specifics to support the thesis (lines 16–17, 29–32, 42–43).
- There is perceptive character analysis (lines 33–36, 49–51).
- There is clear linear development of the essay (lines 9, 13–14, 33, 39, 48).
- The essay is frequently repetitive and needs echo words.
- There are some syntax and diction errors.

This is an example of a strong midrange essay which could make the jump into the highrange area because of its organization, use of detail, and its insights. It's obvious that the writer thoroughly understands the work and presents various specifics to support the thesis. The diction and syntax are, at times, not as mature as would be found on more sophisticated essays. Student Essay B is a basic midrange essay for the following reasons:

- It does begin to address the basic tasks of the prompt.
- It identifies character and theme.
- It refers to the character's journeys but does not really develop any of them (paragraphs 2–3).
- There are many generalizations which need more specific support (lines 10–16, 25–27).
- The essay loses its clear connection to the prompt at times (paragraph 4).
- The diction and syntax, although adequate, lack a maturity seen in higher-level papers.

This lower, midrange essay demonstrates that the writer understands the prompt. It does contain several perceptive insights which are unevenly developed. This is obviously a first draft in need of further revision. The essay would have benefited from more thorough preparation of the work prior to the exam. As it stands, it relies too heavily on generalizations.

Final Comments

Warning! Although the free-response essay may appear to be the easiest and most accessible on the exam, it is fraught with danger. The worst danger is relying on vague references and general statements that are not supported by specific details or lines. In addition, you have to develop the organizational pattern of the essay and control its progression. All too often the essays read like capsule summaries of the plots.

Your lifesaver in this essay situation is preparation. We say this again because it bears repeating:

- Review full-length works you've read during the year.
- Choose a minimum of five works you've connected with.
- Classify the five works to ensure a broad spectrum of types, literary movements, and themes.
- Isolate several *pivotal* scenes, moments, or episodes from each of the five works and examine the suitability of those scenes for a variety of questions.
- Select quotations and details from these pivotal scenes.

- If necessary, reread only the pivotal scenes before you take the exam.

Review

- Remember the pitfalls of the free-response essay: vagueness and plot summary.
- Choose AP-level full-length novels or plays that you thoroughly recall and understand.
- Generally, use this year's material.
- Familiarize yourself with sample free-response prompts.
- Anticipate free-response prompts.
- Develop specific review materials for several full-length works.
- Practice applying your knowledge to a variety of prompts.
- Highlight the prompt to make certain you are addressing the requirements of the question.
- Do not waste time looking at the suggested works. Choose from your own memory bank.
- Plan the essay thoroughly before you begin writing.
- Briefly chart your response. Fill in with concrete details and quotes, if possible.
- Write an engaging opening paragraph that reflects the question's requirements.
- Stay on topic.
- Avoid plot summary.
- Include transitions and echo words.
- Review our models and rubrics for self-evaluation.
- Share your ideas with others.